

# Posy Simmonds

## Drawing Literature



Born in 1945 in Berkshire, Posy Simmonds discovered cartoons from the satirical magazine *Punch* at the age of 3, while exploring the library of her family's farm. From then on, she never stopped drawing.

After a year in Paris to study French Civilisation at the Sorbonne, she went to art school in London. In the late 1960s she published her first book of satirical drawings, which brought her to the attention of various newspapers, opening the doors to the world of the British press. She worked as a cartoonist for *The Guardian* for over three decades, creating archetypal characters that reflect her sharp, humorous eye — such as the members of the Weber, Wright and Heep families and later, the heroines of her future graphic novels.

*Gemma Boverly*, *Tamara Drewe* and *Cassandra Darke* are masterpieces of inventiveness in the composition and layout of texts and drawings — the artist states that she enjoys “writing as much as drawing”. These stories were translated in many countries, bringing her international recognition.

A virtuoso of the graphic palette, she diversified her drawing by creating several children's books in bright colours, contrasting with the austere black and white of her strips published in the press.

Her recent works reveal her constant attention to the social and political aspects of her country and the inequalities in human relations. A Member of the Order of the British Empire and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature since the early 2000s, Posy Simmonds receives further honours and awards and continues her mischievous observation of her fellow human beings.



## Beginnings: Childhood and Youth

Posy Simmonds grew up as a voracious reader of pictures and words. Her parents gave her free rein of their library, on whose lower shelves she could explore old bound volumes of *Punch*, the British magazine renowned for its social and political cartoons.

Posy Simmonds also read the popular press widely and beyond her years, from her father's newspapers and mother's magazines to comics, both British weeklies and the more sensational American imports. Noticing how she loved to write and draw, her father gave her 500 sheets of huge paper, enough to last her childhood and create her own variations.

French and Art were among her best subjects at boarding school, so after leaving in 1962, Posy Simmonds, aged 17, was allowed to go alone to Paris for a one-year course on French Civilisation at the Sorbonne. Experiencing Parisian life and culture transformed her self-image, independence and ambition.

After taking art classes both in Paris and back in London, she wanted to pursue painting at the Central School of Arts and Crafts. Instead, Posy Simmonds switched to graphic design, mastering typography and layout and broadening her range of illustration. Before she graduated, she secured her first paid commission. Her career was only beginning.

## The end of November:

Highs and Lows:



Sound Levels:



## The March of Fe

## A Newspaper Cartoonist

For more than five decades, newspapers and magazines in the British and international press have been the principal outlets for Posy Simmonds. She has worked all her life as a freelance illustrator, so her income was sometimes precarious.

Her longest association by far is with *The Guardian*, a left-of-center paper broadly aligned with her personal politics. She began drawing spot illustrations for them in 1972. Such is her stature today, that she was chosen to illustrate the front cover of their 200th anniversary edition in 2021.

Her big breakthrough there came in 1977, when she was offered the chance to fill in for cartoonist John Kent, while he was away on vacation. Posy Simmonds took over a unique large format, nearly half a page across, on *The Guardian's* 'Women's Page', aimed at their female readers.

For the first time in a British newspaper, a cartoonist could introduce the complexities of contemporary life for women. Luckily, Posy Simmonds had the space to construct her strips like short plays, self-contained and different each week. From 1979 to 1993, many were reprinted in five books. In 1981 she developed some of her characters and episodes into a 48-page 'cartoon story', *True Love*, considered by many as Britain's first graphic novel.



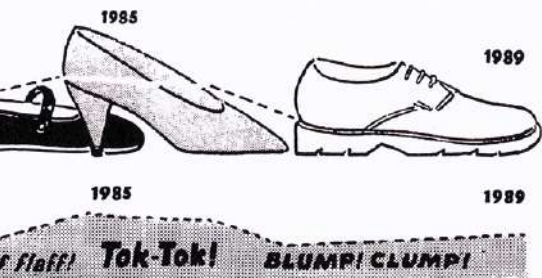
Matilda, 1991 © Posy Simmonds

## Modern Fables for All Ages

In 1987, after ten years producing short comics in black-and-white printed on low-quality newsprint, Posy Simmonds switched to drawing in full colour in mixed media on larger artworks by reinventing herself as a writer and artist of picture books for children. Here was her opportunity to her own childhood favourites from Beatrix Potter to Charles Addams.

She began with *Fred* about a lazy family cat who sleeps all day, only to pass away and be buried in the back garden. But the sad children of the house discover that by night he became 'Famous Fred', the Elvis of the feline world. Posy Simmonds' other animal fables demonstrate surprising alliances in adversity. Lavender, a timid bunny, finds the courage to befriend urban foxes, and a Baker Cat collaborates with the mice hiding in the bakery. Little girls were her other protagonists, from Lulu's reveries in an art gallery and a chocolate wonderland to Matilda's 'dreadful lies'. The results are captivating blends of fantasy with wisdom for all ages and her first books to be translated into French and other languages.

minism





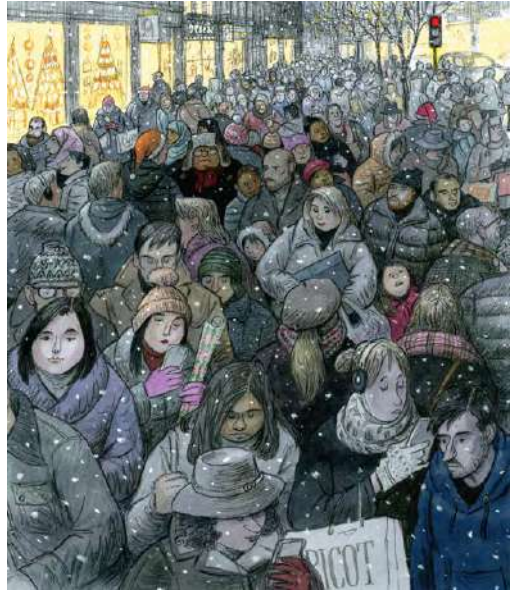
## Gemma, Tamara, Cassandra

The life and career so far of Posy Simmonds seem to lead up to her three graphic novels — *Gemma Boverly* (1999), *Tamara Drewe* (2007) and *Cassandra Darke* (2018) — where all her talents in cartooning, illustration, graphic design, typography and, more than ever, writing combine fluidly on the page to transform how comics can be made and read. Her love of literature led her to choose three 19th century masterpieces, not to produce modernised adaptations, but as inspirations to relate stories distinctly her own which speak to our present day.

Posy Simmonds conceived her 'trilogy' to be serialised first in *The Guardian*, each in a format set by them and in 100-or-so single-page episodes. *Gemma Boverly* and *Tamara Drewe* both premiered in the press, reaching thousands of adults.

Posy Simmonds makes all three of her titular characters female, and agents and catalysts in their narratives.

Her graphic novels have brought her overdue breakthrough abroad, appearing in multiple languages, two of them adapted into movies, and *Gemma Boverly* into a radio serial on France Culture.



Cassandra Darke, 2018 © Posy Simmonds / Denoël Graphic, 2019



Tamara Drewe, 2007 © Posy Simmonds / Denoël Graphic, 2008



Je t'écris parce que tu n'écoutes jamais ! peut-être bien pour toi mais le vrai monde n'est pas partagé les responsabilités sont devenues des convictions politiques  
2 mai 74

les usages chères et trouuées ! dépenses de l'argent. Deiss, tu ne susses ne dureront pas de la raider pure et ne viens pas mieux et tu ne

Tu avais un vrai boulot d'enseignant mais tu l'as laissé tomber - tu n'as pas assumé, comme tu n'assumes rien - comme tu n'as pas assumé notre mariage. "Tout pour avoir la paix", c'est ta devise. Quand les choses se compliquent tu refuses d'y faire face - tu te dérobes. Tu fuis !

Oui, je sais que tu as démissionné "par principe" (curieux que personne d'autre ne l'ait fait dans ton département, ou bien étais-tu le seul à ne plus supporter le poids de l'administration et les quotas d'élèves ?)

Quand vas-tu te décider à chercher un vrai travail? Retaper des antiquités pour la boutique de ton frère n'est pas son idée du travail. Tu devrais t'occuper de ces gens que tu connais aux d'autres écoles d'art.

As-tu la moindre idée de ce que coûtent les enfants ? Je ne devrais pas avoir à t'y suis forcée parce que mon salaire ne permet pas de supplément t'incombe  
Bien à toi

Judi

12 janvier 93  
Charlie dépenses ridicules d'argent pour un enfant qui t'a pris !? Je prodigalité stupide ter d'acheter son affaire ment pathétique n'ai pas le comment p culot de et tu

No Juliette et puisse tu as payé en liquide pas tout déclaré ma pension et augmenter



Deux : quand tu les prends à l'école...Justin va direct au karaté...Della à un anniversaire chez les Pym...Thornhill Road...tu le reprends à 5h 15... tu la reprends à 6h30. Il aura faim... Je rentre à 8 h. tant que tu y es, regarde la machine à laver... elle ne...



## Literary Life, etc.

Through years of promoting her books in bookshops, festivals and the media, Posy Simmonds came to know the publishing world and its eccentricities and absurdities intimately. In 2002, *The Guardian* gave her free rein to contribute to the Book Section of their Saturday edition.

In *Literary Life* she satirised every stage of a book's 'life', from an author's struggles to conceive it to its publicity, sales and reception by critics, booksellers and readers. Each week, Posy Simmonds could vary her approach and style, large, single-panel cartoons, recalling those by Ronald Searle and her other artistic heroes from *Punch*.

At home and abroad, Posy Simmonds' rising profile has led to special commissions, such as a new children's story for Françoise Mouly and Art Spiegelman's *Little Lit* anthologies for kids and French assignments for *Le Figaro*, *Le Point*, *Le Nouvel Observateur* and others. *The Guardian* sent her to Paris Fashion Week, while Cartier Watches commissioned a promotional comic.

Posy Simmonds continues to win prestigious awards, such as the Prix Töpffer in Switzerland. Her sketchbooks offer hints about her next graphic novel — 'to be continued'...







## CREDITS

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### In partnership with

Denoël Graphic

Cartoonmuseum de Bâle

### Media partners

*Madame Figaro*, *Le Figaro*, France Télévisions,  
*Les Arts dessinés*, Canal BD, Pop Women Festival

The Bpi warmly thanks Posy Simmonds.

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

### Bibliothèque publique d'information

25 rue du Renard - 75004 Paris

01 44 78 43 51 - [www.bpi.fr](http://www.bpi.fr)

Subway station: Hôtel de Ville / Rambuteau

### Hours

Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays: 12-10 pm

Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays: 10 am-10 pm

Closed on Tuesdays

You will find a selection of publications and gifts  
at the bookstore of the Centre Pompidou (Forum, level 0).

## WORKSHOPS, MEETINGS, VISITS & ACCESS

### • Guided tours in French – without reservation

5 pm-5.30 pm • every day except Tuesdays, weekends and public holidays

### • Guided tours for all ages – by reservation

2.30 pm-3.15 pm • [Wednesday December 6](#) & [Thursday December 21](#) |  
[January 3 & 18](#) | [February 7 & 22](#) | [March 6 & 21](#)

### • Guided tours in English – by reservation

6 pm-6.30 pm • [Fridays November 24](#) | [December 15](#) |  
[January 26](#) | [February 23](#) | [March 29](#)

### • Guided tours in Spanish – by reservation

6 pm-6.30 pm • [Mondays December 18](#) | [January 22](#) |  
[February 19](#) | [March 18](#)

### • Workshops for the general public and specific audiences – by reservation

### Contact, information and reservation

01 44 78 13 83 - 01 44 78 44 45

[visites@bpi.fr](mailto:visites@bpi.fr)

### • Guided tours in LSF (French sign language)

[Wednesday December 13](#) • 4 pm | [Sunday January 21](#) • 3 pm  
[Monday February 5](#) • 3 pm | [Friday March 8](#) • 6 pm



Information and reservation : [lecture-handicap@bpi.fr](mailto:lecture-handicap@bpi.fr)

Texts of the exhibition are available in audio version through QR codes.

Bring your smartphone and headphones !

• A commented filmed tour will be available after the opening of the exhibition.

### • Meetings around the work of Posy Simmonds

(program in progress)

[Thursday 23rd November](#) • 7 pm • **Posy Simmonds & Coco**  
as part of Festival Paris en toutes lettres

[Saturday 20th January](#) • Bibliothèque publique d'information •  
as part of Nuits de la lecture

[Monday 19th February \(to be confirmed\)](#) • 7 pm • **Interview with Posy Simmonds** • Centre Pompidou, Petite salle

[Monday 11th March](#) • 7 pm • Centre Pompidou, Petite salle

**EXHIBITION PLAN**

